

**Reauthorization of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Act  
Testimony by Congressman David Vitter  
Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee Hearing  
July 8, 2004**

I would first like to thank Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member Costello and Members of the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to come and testify today regarding H.R. 4470, a bill extending the authorization of appropriations for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program from fiscal year 2005 to 2010. I am also honored to be joined by Carlton Dufrechou, Executive Director of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and fellow Louisiana Congressman Baker, a member of the subcommittee.

As a freshman in Congress, one of the first pieces of legislation I introduced was the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Act of 1999 which established the Lake Pontchartrain Restoration program within the Environmental Protection Agency. The purpose of this legislation was to give Lake Pontchartrain the same status as the Great Lakes and Florida Everglades restoration efforts. In addition, this legislation also created a partnership between the federal government and local stakeholders to further efforts to clean up the lake. I was extremely proud when it passed the House overwhelming by a vote of 418-6 and was signed into law as part of the Estuaries and Clean Waters Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-457). This was the first step in achieving the ultimate goal of fully restoring the lake.

A great deal has been accomplished since the enactment of the *Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Act of 2000*. There has been significant improvement in the water clarity in Lake Pontchartrain. We have seen the return of manatees, pelicans, oysters, clams and blue crabs to the lake. The NO SWIMMING signs are coming down and beaches are being reopened. There has been an improvement in water quality on the south shore, however the same can not yet be said of the north shore and the upper basin. Growing suburbs and inconsistent urban planning has dramatically increased pollution as well as destroyed some habitat.

The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program has made great progress in cleaning up Lake Pontchartrain. We have come so far however there is still much to be done. Various water-quality studies within the Lake Pontchartrain Basin have been conducted over the past three years. These studies have helped provide solutions in keeping the lake clean. While this certainly has been extremely helpful to all the 16 parishes in the Basin, we must move to the next phase, construction. I sincerely hope that future funding under this program will be used to construct much needed inflow and infiltration projects.

Over the past three years, I have secured nearly \$18 million for work in the basin. Of course, this \$18 million is a great piece of the process, but we can not continue to provide piecemeal funding for the Lake Pontchartrain Restoration Program. The full level of funding, \$100 million is needed to regain a sustainable, fully functioning and full restoration of Lake Pontchartrain. It is vitally important for this subcommittee to vote on H.R. 4470 and Congress pass the reauthorization bill before the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman, Subcommittee Members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the reauthorization of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Restoration Program. I would be more than happy to take any questions you may have.